



MEET THE NEW CHAIN GANG

by Rosalind Stefanac

PHOTOS (JAMES MORRISON): ROBYN RUSSELL



+ Feature

IF SOME DAYS FEEL LIKE you're just a cog in the pharmacy prescription wheel, unable to practise the profession the way you'd imagined, read on. As these pharmacists are proving, you can create programs and services to benefit your patients, even if you're working for a multinational corporation. In fact, if you're anything like these four innovators, you'll find a way to use your employer's breadth of influence and deep resources to make your pharmacy function even better—and keep your patients coming back for more.

JAMES MORRISON /
pharmacy manager, Walmart, Burlington, ON

If you offer it, they will come

Pharmacist James Morrison never stops looking for opportunities to improve healthcare services by connecting with patients. In fact, he's been hugely successful on this front ever since joining Walmart as a pharmacy intern in 2010.

"When I finished [pharmacy school] I had offers from everybody, but chose Walmart because I felt they were pushing us forward instead of pushing us back," says the Nova Scotia native. "They've been very supportive of anything I wanted to do."

Case in point: during his time as pharmacy manager at the Walmart pharmacy in Parry Sound, Ont., Morrison initiated the first-ever pharmacy flu shots in the area. "I launched our new service with a media event where I invited the MPP to receive his flu shot at the pharmacy," he says. "My district manager came out and it was a huge success—we did more than 150 flu shots that year."

During that first year, Morrison's pharmacy also provided some 250 MedChecks and within two years, prescriptions increased from approximately 500 to 800 per week.

"When I was accepted into pharmacy school, the role of the pharmacist was very different from what I'm doing now," says Morrison. "We're doing things I never dreamed of, like giving injections and initiating prescriptions."

Morrison credits his employer for providing ongoing opportunities for pharmacy staff to enhance their skills through initiatives, such as training for injections or designations in smoking cessation and diabetes. He

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says taking the Diabetes Smart Program offered through Walmart ultimately prepared him to write his certified diabetes educator's exam. With the CDE designation displayed on his lapel, Morrison says he is often asked diabetes-related questions around lifestyle and nutrition, and does regular screenings to identify patients at risk.

A recent COPD screening clinic, at which pharmacy staff assessed the lung age of patients, was another effective way to connect with customers. "One of my associates brought in her daughters who are smokers and I was able to get them on a [smoking cessation] program and write them prescriptions," says Morrison. "To play a role in helping people quit smoking and keep healthy is one of the greatest things."

His patient care efforts have already earned Morrison accolades at Walmart and within the profession with awards from the Ontario Pharmacists Association and Canadian Pharmacists Association. But you won't find this pharmacist resting on his laurels. Although Morrison has only been at his current location in Burlington, Ont., since January 2014, he's already scoping out ways to incorporate new services. "Now our store has started extended hours, so that offers a huge opportunity in quieter times to make sure people are getting their flu shots," he says.

This fall, Morrison plans to reach out to local groups to offer educational seminars and services outside the pharmacy. "I want to start doing talks around diabetes for seniors to discuss foot care and nutrition," he says. "Eventually I would like our store to become a hub in the community and really raise our profile so people see our pharmacy as the place to go for their healthcare needs."



JOHN PASTERGIU /
owner, Shoppers Drug Mart, Toronto, ON

Document your work and share your successes

When it comes to being a successful pharmacist, John Papastergiou adheres

to a simple motto: if you're doing something innovative, tell people about it.

This pharmacist/owner of two Shoppers Drug Marts in Toronto, has made it his mission to research the outcomes of various services offered through his pharmacies so he can share the data with others.

"I noticed a lot of [pharmacists] in the community were doing great

work across the country but very few were publishing," he says. "If you gather a bit of data, publish it and tell people about it, there's a better chance it will get adopted on a grander scale."

Papastergiou's advice comes from first-hand experience. He and his team initiated a number of practice-based research projects to evaluate the theory that community pharmacists are in a unique position to screen and monitor patients for chronic diseases. In addition to publishing his successful outcomes in home medication reviews and HbA1c testing in the *Canadian Pharmacists Journal* (and one pending publication in the *Canadian Diabetes Association Journal*), he has presented his research at provincial and national pharmacy conferences. The HbA1c pilot conducted at his store in 2011 was so successful, in fact, Shoppers opted to roll out the service across all its stores nationally reaching some 13,000 patients to date.

"Our head office is extremely supportive; they see the value to the business and the brand and help me get the word out to other associates," says Papastergiou. But he's quick to stress that despite his research focus he's still running a business. "We are very busy and putting out 100,000 scripts a year."

For pharmacists wishing to enhance their pharmacy services, his advice is to start simply and grow as the demand does. "Start with something like HbA1c testing for diabetes that can be directly tied to professional services," he says. "Or offer a few clinics so you can recruit staff for just those days without blowing your labor budget."

Papastergiou acknowledges that these kinds of initiatives take time and investment. "You can't do everything at once and you may not be profitable in the first few weeks, but if you invest the time and labour the demand will come." One example is the launch of cholesterol screenings at his stores. "We started with two to three patients a week and now we're seeing up to 40 with physicians referring people to us," he says.

His staff is encouraged to be just as innovative as he is. "If they want to come in when they're not scheduled and offer a

clinic they don't have to ask me," he says. "They just have to get enough patients to offset the costs and many of my pharmacists take advantage of that."

Named this year's Pharmacist of the Year by the Canadian Pharmacists Association, Papastergiou believes the profession is at its most exciting point ever. "The demand for good pharmacists who can implement professional services has never been greater," he says. "This is what we dreamed of when we graduated."



MIKE DILFER /
staff pharmacist, Target, Courtney, BC

Find ways to connect with your patients every day

The best part about practising pharmacy in a retail setting like Target is the sheer accessibility to patients every day, says staff pharmacist Mike Dilfer. "You see the same people here week after week because it's part of their routine so it's not hard to convince them to come talk to you for a few minutes

and answer some questions face to face," he says. "Having that presence in people's everyday lives is so important."

Dilfer joined Target's new franchise pharmacy owner Chris Sutton in April of this year after his previous employer shut down. He says he's excited by the fact his new boss is "clinically minded and customer-oriented." While the pharmacy is still in the midst of getting organized, the plan is to take full advantage of professional services and even specialize in areas like mental health, which is a particular passion of Sutton's.

Coming from another large corporation, Safeway, Dilfer says he is used to having a supportive environment where he is able to make things happen at the store level. "[Management] made it clear that they were open to financing projects for the expansion of services and business," he says. "We would have to figure out how to make

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it work logistically, but they were great about giving us funding for promotions or extra staff."

Dilfer has come a long way both literally and figuratively in terms of his current role at Target. Originally from California, he studied fisheries and wildlife, and later health and human performance, before pursuing pharmacy. He spent 10 years in Portland as a pharmacist in both hospital and community settings, and then relocated to Vancouver Island in 2010 to be closer to his wife's family.

Eventually Dilfer landed a job at Safeway, the same employer he had worked for in the US, but admits to having had some challenging adapting to a new way of practising the profession. "The therapeutics were more or less the same, but there were so many differences in terms of regulations," he says. At the time, BC was also much more progressive than Oregon in pushing pharmacy forward.

When the business closed and Dilfer lost his job, he and a colleague started a casual monthly meeting with other pharmacists in the area; something that continues to the present. "Sometimes we identify common practice-related issues or we may not talk about clinical issues at all," he says. "It's really just an opportunity to talk to other people who are going through some of the same things so you can bounce ideas."

In addition to connecting with pharmacists, Dilfer thrives on building relationships with the next generation of practitioners. He was recently honoured with a mentorship award for his outstanding leadership in the profession from the British Columbia Pharmacy Association. "When we have students in the pharmacy I take it very seriously," he says. "I want them to understand that there is a huge amount of information out there, and a number of potential avenues to pursue to figure out where they're going to fit in their future careers."

ADELINE TAN /
pharmacist, Safeway Pharmacy, Vancouver, BC



Determine your patients' needs and be their resource

As a pharmacist, Adeline Tan has always aspired to be more clinically oriented, especially in the areas of chronic disease management and prevention. Working for Safeway Pharmacy in Vancouver since graduating from the University of British Columbia (UBC), she has managed to meet this goal in her everyday practice. "Here at Safeway, I have the opportunity to apply all that I've learned at school and I can see the impact I'm having on patients," she says.

When Tan started her career, she recognized a particular need for pharmacy services among her diabetes patients who were often coming to her with questions and concerns. "We had lots of people with diabetes who needed constant management with their condition," she says, adding that this prompted her to pursue a designation as a certified diabetes educator. "Safeway provided me with the resources I needed for

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training and allowed me to set up clinics for these patients in preparation of getting my CDE," she says. "They've always recognized the importance of practising in innovative ways."

The results have been fruitful. With its latest renovation, the pharmacy now has a private consultation room that Tan uses to conduct her half-hour consults once a week. The sessions commonly focus on proper glucose management, lifestyle modifications and insulin injection training. "Patients really appreciate the privacy and attention I can give them," she says. "And it's always satisfying when someone comes back to tell me how a recommendation I made helped to clear up a condition they had."

Through the help of a Safeway healthcare consultant, Tan also travels to other Safeway locations and community settings in Vancouver to deliver clinics focused on diabetes care. In doing so, she's managed to forge networks with local community groups and various seniors' centres. She also participates in annual health and wellness fairs in the area.

Strengthening relationships with local physicians is also key on Tan's recurring to-do list. "I visit them personally and let them know that I am here to work with them to manage their diabetes patients," she says. "As a result, I'm getting more referrals from physicians for insulin injection training."

But it doesn't stop there. A pharmacy instructor at UBC, Tan is part of a pharmacy lab that instructs students on the practical aspects of the new expanded scope of pharmacy practice. "I'm teaching them things like how to take blood pressure readings using a stethoscope," she says.

Her dedication to improving patient care among her pharmacy patients and in the community recently earned Tan a Magnum Opus award from the British Columbia Pharmacy Association.

And while her focus is diabetes management, it's by no means the only thing on her list of expanded scope services. Tan is involved in medication reviews, immunizations and osteoporosis education, as well as anemia and cholesterol management. "In BC, we're not able to diagnose and treat certain minor ailments yet, but I'm eagerly awaiting that too," she says. If her track record is any indication, there's no doubt her patients will reap the benefits. +

Rosalind Stefanac is a Toronto writer and former editor of *Pharmacy Practice*.